The Green Animal Rights Network

By Peter David Smith

The Green Animal Rights Network or "G.A.R.N." was a desperate idea I came up with way back in the 1990s.

It was born of the desperate need to find an individualistic way of distributing information and "garnering" support for various campaigns such as anti-fascist, pro-environmentalism, concern for people, concern about children, concern about animals and so on and so forth. The network was neither "on the left" nor "on the right" nor "in the centre". Nor was it anarchist or nihilist.

I used the term "animal rights" in those days because I thought it meant the same as "animal welfare". I was wrong. Animal rights and animal welfare are not the same thing and I now realise that I am on the animal welfare side of the divide. If I was doing the network thing these days I would have to have called it "G.A.W.N."

G.A.R.N. was not a group. The idea was to make a network between all of the existing groups that I had any agreement with. It was designed to enable me and any like-minded people to work and campaign without the need of groups or leaders.

The initial motivation was annoyance and frustration with the way groups worked.

I saw that groups were inherently socialising in the sense of trying to get everybody joined up with everybody else. They didn't like lone independent personalities like me.

I found that every group I went to, such as Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, Anti-Bloodsports etc., kept trying to link me up with any other available unattached person.

They did that by continually mentioning the other person's name to me with a sense of hinting that I should "help".

Sometimes the person would try to put themselves forward by trying to strike up conversations or suggest that we should work together (sort of like study-buddies in an American high school movie) and it seemed to be sanctioned by the group and people either didn't notice that I objected or didn't care and, perhaps, pretended not to notice.

I got so sick and tired of these "joining up" and socialising pressures that I left all of the groups and started my own network to put up a stall in the High Street on Saturdays and get signatures on petitions and distribute leaflets. Sometimes I managed to encourage other people to work on the stall too but the problem there was that people I knew from the various groups would try to corrupt the network by introducing that socialising group way of thinking.

They always tended to be homophobic.

Because I'm male they usually tried to pair me up with someone female. They once heard that I had been seen talking to another campaigner whose nickname was Steff. They immediately started making insinuations that "Steff" was my "girlfriend". They stopped immediately that they found out that "Steff" was a man named Stephan.

The fact that Stephan was a man spoiled all of their sexist, homophobic gossipy amusement.

When a woman named Gail started helping out on my stall the rumour mongers started up again, making creepy insinuating remarks about Gail this and Gail that and so on.

Another problem was when people started trying to give me money at the stall. I kept telling them that I neither wanted nor needed their money and that I would be happy for them to simply read a leaflet and sign a petition. Some of them seemed really crestfallen that I wouldn't take their money and one bloke went on for so long insisting and insisting and trying to press money upon me that I almost got into a fist fight with him about it. I had to physically push him away from the stall when he tried to surreptitiously leave some money on the table. I physically pushed him away and stood barring him from putting anything on that trestle table. I even raised my fists and adopted a balanced fighting stance until he reluctantly went away.

Honestly. Some people!!!

Another time somebody signed a petition and then asked me "What's it all about then?" AFTER THEY HAD SIGNED!!!

Honestly. Total blithering morons.

Eventually I stopped all of the G.A.R.N. Networking thing. Partly because everybody else was trying to preserve the status quo and the "on the left" pairing up of people. And partly because, by sheer coincidence, a very similar South West of England networking thing suddenly sprang into existence from out of nowhere and I decided to let them do it because there was only one of me and dozens of them.

Society has a deep prejudice against allowing lone individual personalities to be left alone. They want everyone to be "joined up" and part of the group.

In the Emin they called it getting everybody to a default position of human nature, a position called "essence" which shuns human individual "personality" as a bad thing.

On the Sesame course at the Central School of Speech and Drama the head tutor kept advising me to "Tune in. Tune in with the group Pete. Tune in with the group".

My sisters kept telling me that going off into a room by myself and reading books all the time wasn't "normal". They wanted me to do the "normal" thing of sitting around the telly with everybody else. Being "normal".

In groups they call it "helping". They want to normalise everyone by making us all the same.

There is a war going on between individualists like me and the ones who want to be a hive mind. "Come and join us" they say "We are happy" they say "We are normal" they say.

When I was 24 I had a breakdown over this. Temporarily I began to think that there was AN ACTUAL HIVEMIND but then I calmed down, chilled out a bit and realised that they were only following a different instinct than me.

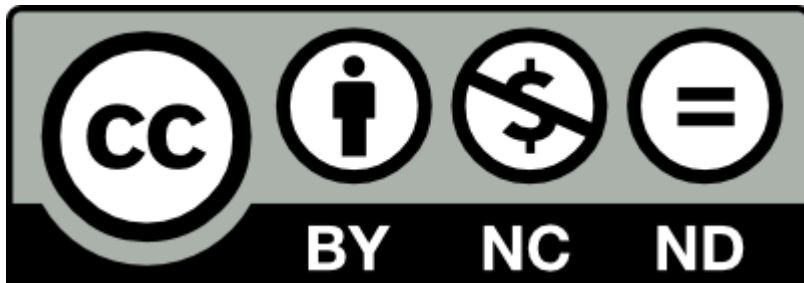They were following the herdlike human instinct to stick close together in the tribe.

I, on the other hand, am following the human instinct to be a lone individual who follows his own path.

Both of these instincts are inherited by every generation. Some go with the herd instinct. Some go with loner instinct. It has always been this way. In every generation.

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